

The Royal Veterinary College celebrates 20 years of life-saving blood donations by launching birthday appeal

The Royal Veterinary College (RVC) is celebrating 20 years of its life-saving blood donation programme – which has supported thousands of furry friends over the years. To mark the special occasion and provide more cats and dogs with this vital service, the RVC's charity, The Animal Care Trust (ACT), has launched an appeal to raise £150,000 towards new facilities and is calling on local residents for support.

Established in 2004, the RVC's blood donor programme is the first and only veterinary hospital in the UK with a dedicated transfusion medicine service. It is also the only organisation in the UK that stores feline blood products.

Since the first donor cohort of just 19 dogs twenty years ago, the programme now benefits from 150 dogs and 62 cats who regularly donate their blood to others being treated at the RVC's Small Animal Referral Hospital based at the North Mymms Hawkshead campus. Similar to humans, sick cats and dogs sometimes require blood transfusions. As well as organising a reliable supply of blood products to the hospital, the RVC has also pioneered the development of transfusion medicine in cats and dogs carrying out research into the welfare of donors, how to store cat blood and amazingly, using dog blood to help cats.

This was the case for Millie, a six-month-old kitten who was brought into the RVC with acute anaemia and hypoglycaemia, and Feline Infectious Peritonitis. While the condition is nearly always fatal without therapy, thanks to first donor Neville, a ginger tabby, and then an emergency xenotransfusion from Willow, a border collie, Millie made a full recovery. Neville's owner, Nicole, said "The donor team were always fantastic with Neville. He always came home happy and full of treats. Knowing that his donation has helped save the lives of other cats makes me feel very proud."

With the service expanding over the years, the demand for cat and dog blood continues to grow. While fundraising efforts for the blood donor programme have taken place for several years, in its 20th year, the ACT is launching a special birthday appeal to raise £150,000 towards creating new facilities. This will not only improve the experience for donors but will also create separate dedicated areas for dogs and cats and give the team space for their own laboratory to process and store donated blood products.

Dan Chan, a local resident and the RVC's Professor of Emergency and Critical Care Medicine, said:

"I've seen first-hand how blood donations help pets every single day and the ground-breaking clinical treatment and expert care that is provided at the hospital.

"Thanks to our special donors, blood transfusions have saved thousands of lives at the RVC over the last two decades and there are many more in need of help. Therefore, this appeal is essential in allowing us to expand and enhance our current facilities to ensure even more cats and dogs can be treated. Anything you donate will be hugely appreciated and help us to achieve this important goal."

The special appeal's first donor is Ken Follett, founder of the Follett Trust and best-selling author, said:

"The aim of The Follett Trust is to support local charitable causes and those causes which are close to mine and my wife, Barbara's, hearts. As dog lovers, we have had many Labradors over the years, and so have seen firsthand the high-quality care provided by the Royal Veterinary College. We are grateful to the RVC for its continued dedication to both pets and their owners and are proud to be able to support this new and vital venture."

Supporters can share donations with the RVC by visiting www.rvc.ac.uk/act or calling 01707 666237.

As part of the appeal, the RVC will announce its cat and dog 'winners' of its 'Blood Donor of the Year' awards next month as well as celebrating those pets who have played an integral part in donating over the years, in celebration of World Blood Donor Day in June.